

REMARKS

I. Status of the Application

Claims 26-49 are pending in the Application. Claims 26-28, 30-32, 35-39 and 41-49 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Benoit et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,087,003 in view of either Zebulske, U.S. Patent No. 1,725,680, Walter, U.S. Patent No. 5,718,764, or Hoffman, U.S. Patent No. 5,639,304. Claims 33-34 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Benoit et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,087,003, in view of Roberts et al., U.S. Patent No., 4,166,536, and either Zebulske, U.S. Patent No. 1,725,680, Walter, U.S. Patent No. 5,718,764, or Hoffman, U.S. Patent No. 5,639,304. Claim 29 stands rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Benoit et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,087,003, in view of Wheeler et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,055,272, and either Zebulske, U.S. Patent No. 1,725,680, Walter, U.S. Patent No. 5,718,764, or Hoffman, U.S. Patent No. 5,639,304. Applicants gratefully acknowledge that claim 40 is allowable if written in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and intervening claims.

While Applicants respectfully traverse the Examiner's obviousness rejections of the claims, Applicants have cancelled claim 1 without prejudice to the filing of any appropriate continuation applications. Applicants have amended claim 40 to incorporate the limitations of claim 1. Applicants have amended claims 27, 29, 30, 32-39, 41, 43 and 47 to depend from claim 40. Applicants have amended claims 45 and 46 to recite the hook limitation of claim 40. Applicants respectfully request entry and consideration of the foregoing amendments that are intended to place this case in condition for allowance.

The amendments presented herein add no new matter. Since the subject matter of claim 40 has already been indicated to be allowable, the amendment to claim 40 into independent form



has not been made for purposes related to patentability. Accordingly, claims 27-44 and 47 are entitled to a full scope of equivalents.

Applicants respectfully request entry and consideration of the foregoing amendments, which are intended to place the case in condition for allowance.

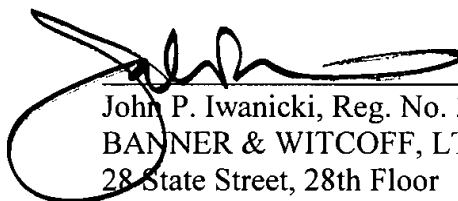
II. Conclusion

Having addressed all outstanding issues, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and allowance of all pending claims. To the extent the Examiner believes that it would facilitate allowance of the case, the Examiner is requested to telephone the undersigned at the number below.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated:

January 23, 2004



John P. Iwanicki, Reg. No. 34,628
BANNER & WITCOFF, LTD.
28 State Street, 28th Floor
Boston, MA 02109
(617) 720-9600